

The Government of Tunisia is committed to bringing open government policies and practices to the local level to enhance socio-economic development. The 2014 Constitution enshrines the principles of open government at the municipal level (Art. 139), while the 2nd Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan recognises the importance of local governments for effective citizen engagement. Despite a challenging environment – for example, local governments were appointed in 2011 though have been awaiting local elections since – and a very centralised governance structure, the cities of La Marsa, Sfax and Sayada have taken ambitious steps to experiment with open government policies.

The OECD, at Tunisia's request, is supporting the country in strengthening its open government reform efforts by providing and disseminating policy analysis to facilitate the integration of local governments' open government policies in the national agenda. For this purpose, a series of open government seminars and peer review missions were organised in the three cities of La Marsa (21-22 February), Sfax (21-22 March) and Sayada (23-24 March), with the participation of peers from Belgium, Canada and France.

Harnessing participatory budgeting processes to build trust in La Marsa

Being confronted with new demands for transparency and participation after 2011, the municipality of La Marsa, upon civil society's suggestions, adopted a participatory budgeting process. This allowed the discussion and decision-making process for municipal projects to be conducted through



an open and inclusive process. This process has been welcomed by citizens and civil society, and now needs to be aligned with the new annual investment plan (PAI) process. Based on this success, the municipality is confronted with extending open government practices to its overall functioning, which is a challenge in a context of a culture of secrecy, limited financial and human capacities and little interest to participate in municipal activities, particularly by youth. Nevertheless, the commitment of the municipal council and administration, as well as very active local NGOs, provides the basis to strengthen ongoing open government practices before the upcoming elections and to make open government a standard that a new local government cannot disregard.

Building a new relationship with citizens through participatory budgeting in Sfax

Similar to La Marsa, the city of Sfax adopted participatory budgeting in 2015, thereby providing citizens and civil society organizations with an avenue to participate in municipal decisions. This process has been modified given the centrally imposed requirements for the adoption of an annual

investment plan (PAI). As an industrial capital, Sfax has a relatively strong financial situation compared to other Tunisian cities, though despite this situation, the current block on hiring new staff presents a challenge for the city to move ahead in open government policies and practices. While citizens and local NGOs are involved in the participatory processes for the budget and PAI, local businesses and business associations struggle to interact with the right counterparts.



Opening up data and engaging in a dialogue with citizens in Sayada

The engagement of active citizens made Sayada one of the first cities in Tunisia to open its data after 2011. Based on their initiative, the city now publishes its municipal council meeting minutes, key budget data and statistics on a regular basis on a website co-managed with civil society. As a relatively small city, citizens and civil society remain actively engaged and interested in municipal activities and decisions. The current mayor was appointed in February 2017 after a year without a municipal council and faces public demands for transparency and participation, though is challenged by limited human and financial resources.



Next Steps

The OECD will draft an Open Government Review of La Marsa, Sfax and Sayada that will analyse their open government efforts at the local level in the context of the ongoing decentralisation process. The Review will collect best practices and provide hands-on policy recommendations to the central and local level to make open government policies more effective. The results will be presented and discussed at a national conference in the fall of 2017.